PHOTO & CAPTION Fruits of Daily Labor



A USAID project is providing jobs and more than 1 million fruit tree saplings to beneficiaries in southern Afghanistan Afghanistan was once known around the world for fruits such as pomegranates, grapes, apricots, and plums. But three decades of war left many of its orchards and vineyards in ruins, crippling fruit exports and creating widespread unemployment.

Orchards throughout southern Afghanistan are bouncing back thanks to a USAID project which is distributing more than one million fruit tree saplings to farmers in Kandahar and Helmand Provinces. The project also provides short-term jobs to nearly 4,000 laborers who are planting the saplings and rehabilitating damaged orchards.

The workers are trained in pruning and horticultural methods. Saplings are procured through local government-approved nurseries and inspected to ensure highest quality.

At a distribution center in Arghandab District, Kandahar Province, farmers stand in the morning sun waiting to receive saplings, while in another line stand the laborers eager to work on their farms. Twenty-year-old Husain Shah is a day laborer by trade. Like most itinerant workers he hires himself out to clean canals and help at harvest time. But it's an unstable source of revenue, with work often hard to come by.

"One month of employment means a lot when you don't know from one day to the next whether you'll have work," he said. "And it's good to work on a project that you know is benefitting local farmers."

Workers like Shah are vulnerable to recruitment by the insurgency. The short-term jobs provided by USAID draw thousands of fighting-age men away from illicit activity, encouraging greater stability in the region.